

*The Voice of God
in My Soul*

VIRGINIA BRECKINRIDGE BATES

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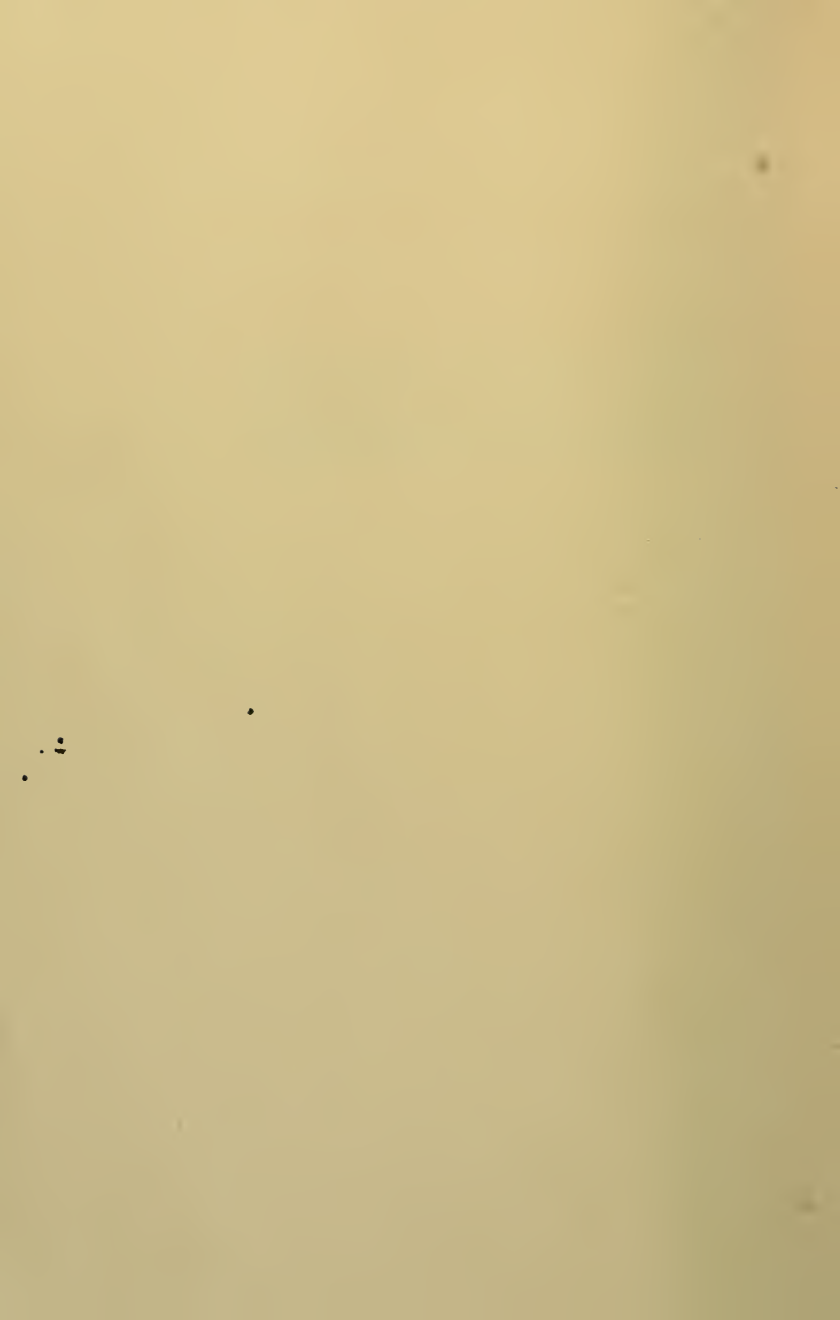
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Breckinridge.

How may I know the voice of
God in my soul?



**How May I Know the
Voice of God in my Soul?**



How May I Know the Voice of God in my Soul?

By
VIRGINIA BRECKINRIDGE [✓]BATES

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*Holy Ghost, unerring guide,
Lead me, lest I turn aside.
Let my will so yielded be,
I can hear Thee speak to me.*

TO THE MEMBERS
of the
WEDNESDAY CLASS OF ST. LOUIS
and the
TUESDAY CLASS OF CHICAGO
with deep affection and with the prayer that
it may carry a helpful thought to each
heart and life, this little book
is dedicated.

THE STORY

This is not a treatise, but a practical talk—a paper prepared and put into permanent form by request. It was read before a young woman's class or club, which has had a thousand or more members and has continued with uninterrupted weekly meetings during a long term of years.

The class was originated by two little girls, who, having become interested in religious matters through evangelistic meetings, were praying together in their own homes.

Branch classes have been formed and the members are widely scattered, filling the various avenues of usefulness and of influence. Among them are mothers of families, daugh-

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ters at home, missionaries, wives of ministers, teachers, kindergartners, and many others. Some are actively connected with the Young Women's Christian Association and the Order of the King's Daughters. The children of some of the charter members are old enough to enjoy the meetings. The number of Sunday school children that have been taught by the members would probably reach into the thousands.

There are in connection with the class an organized system of benevolence and a circulating library.

A program has been introduced containing subjects for each week of the year.

The subjects treated in the meetings are exclusively religious, and for years the members united in repeating the following prayer:

" Oh, that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me."

**How May I Know the
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How May I Know the Voice of God in my Soul?

GOD'S dealings with us are strange. Even in small things, we are amazed oft-times at His methods, and the fact that I am presenting this theme to you to-day, my dear friends, is an evidence of it. It is, in a way, an answer to my strong cries in prayer to Him, that He would teach me to know His voice in my own soul, to discern it among the many voices there, and to obey it.

In studying for you, I have learned deep lessons for myself, and I long and pray that I may be able to impart them to you.

In sending you the list of subjects, for which you asked, I did not know that I should be requested to expound this one to you, else I should not have dared to send it. But is it not the most essential question in life,

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—life itself, really,—since to know God “is life eternal,” and without this knowledge we are wandering—aimless—with no assurance for this life, and none for the life everlasting.

As it had been the theme of my own longings and my prayers, I thought it would help you to consider it, as I had done, to ponder over and pray about it, hoping for growing light. This light we must seek until we find; this knowledge we are under the deepest obligation to acquire, since life, present and future, Christian character and Christian influence depend upon our obtaining it.

What difference, then, does it make to you or to me whether or not we know and heed the voice of God—as especially spoken to us—in our souls? Ah, my precious friends, it makes every difference—all difference! Therein lies the very secret of life and hope, or the very sting—hidden but real—the beginning of failure and death. Then we do well to ponder deeply and to know this voice, in the obeying of

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which is embodied the very essence of success and blessing. Is it not a wonderful truth that God condescends to speak to us at all? And as He does, should it not be the aim of our existence to hear and to comprehend His voice?

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Our heavenly Father guides us in many ways, though all of the examples we could give should probably be grouped under one of the three following heads: He guides us by His Holy Word—the Bible, by the Holy Spirit, and by His providence. Yet we cannot pursue the argument—in each division of the topic—logically to its close, as their lines cross each other at times, finally blending. Thus without the interpretation of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, in its deeper meaning, is incomprehensible to man; while the Spirit generally uses the words of the Bible as the medium of His communication to the heart of man; and the providences of God are inexplicable without the light of both the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

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You will remember how our blessed Saviour, in His hour of temptation, repeated again and again, "It is written"—quoting the Word of God to the adversary. His example is transcendent! We have—we need—no higher proof that God speaks to the soul, through His written word.

And how many manifestations we have of His speaking thus in our daily experience. The Christians who know God's Word and are familiar with its contents, looking to the Spirit to reveal its meaning to them, need not to be told this. When I began to think upon our theme of to-day verse after verse came to me, a veritable throng, bearing directly upon it and throwing clear light, showing that God does speak to the soul through His Word.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." The Holy Spirit "shall take" of the things of God, and "shew them unto us." Foremost among the verses that came to me was the following, which is an exact Biblical answer to the subject of our lesson.

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The question we ask is: "How may I know the voice of God in my soul?" The answer is: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

It is the will of God that we wish to know in the voice. It is for the purpose of indicating His will that He speaks, and in order that our will may be transformed into the likeness of His own, and that our actions may follow our renewed mind and will.

Part of another verse is almost as clear a response to our question. "Then shall we know if we follow on to know." It is not for the still small voice we are listening, as did Elijah when he stood forth, we like the scenic effect of the wind, the earthquake and the fire, but God was in none of them. As God

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manifests Himself to us, even so must we accept Him, else we cannot receive Him at all. He has foreordained that in the still small voice—the voice of the Spirit recalling His word—He will reveal Himself to man, and this voice in the soul is inaudible, unless we listen, and stifled if we fail to obey. To follow on means to obey as we know! Each known wish of God eagerly heard and fulfilled gives a keener ear for His spiritual communications, and a renewed aptness and zeal in obeying the next command.

May I plead with you a moment from my own experience? Personally I have suffered pain which I call anguish, because of failures, long ago past. Out of the years comes the memory of some lack of thoughtfulness, some selfishness, some wrong done; and how often is this repeated now in our daily life! No matter how trifling the circumstances may seem at the time, or how grave, nothing is unimportant when the element of right or wrong is to be considered.

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Oh, how I should love to save you from this suffering, and to lead you once and forever to ask, "What does the voice say, what is God's will in this case, what does the trend of the Bible teach me, how does the Spirit apply the teaching to my soul in this instance? Not what I want to do; let me not even consider this question, but only and always what I ought to do." Only in this path are happiness and safety. However narrow it may seem to one outside, it is the only way of peace and righteousness. It recalls the sacred words: "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

God is the great source of power, of force, of helpfulness, of hope. We are standing in a place of danger. Few persons realize this, and when I say realize, I mean few are so convinced of their peril as to take the practical means of protection and safety. God, as

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He bestows Himself upon us is the only all-powerful helper and protector.

We meet each day individually as it comes, not the whole life in one mass, and on the one hand God has warned us of its dangers, and on the other hand has revealed to us His power to succor us. His voice in the Word promises this, through the Holy Spirit He bestows His strength upon us, and in the providences of life He shows us our practical needs and the all-sufficient help which he gives. Since all help comes from God, the first important duty of each day is to go to God and be equipped for that day.

The day is the life in miniature. If God speaks to us through the Bible, and by laying His words up in our minds, it becomes possible for the Holy Spirit to recall them to our memory later, then, the first duty of each day is to prepare for that day, in all it may bring, by hearing God's voice distinctly in His Word, by being silent before Him and by praying the Spirit to open our hearts to receive His truth.

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When in my own experience I feel I must get great help from our Heavenly Father, I first implore the intercession of Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour, who “ever liveth to make intercession for us.” Then I ask the Holy Spirit to pray with me, for He “maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” To get into close personal relations with God—to comprehend His voice as He speaks to us in the soul—this is the key note of true Christian living, and it is just here that many Christians fail. They start out to meet the battle of life utterly unprepared. They do not calculate the absolute disadvantage at which they distinctly place themselves.

There is a burden of life which must be borne, and man’s strength is inadequate for it. The cares of life alone will crush a man unaided, and God’s voice has so plainly said, “Cast all your care upon Me.” “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your re-

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quests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Only in prayer—real prayer—not the vague repetition that we call prayer, but the prayer that lays hold upon God, can we obtain this help. "Let him take hold of My strength that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me."

Besides the cares of life, which cover all of our duties and responsibilities, there are the temptations of life, and the enemy to meet. The world, the flesh, and the devil are not unknown to us in their baleful influences, nor has the heavenly voice left us without suggestion in regard to them. "The fashion of this world passeth away." "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "There is a way that seemeth right

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unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Keep thyself "unspotted from the world." "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

And concerning the arch tempter, the chief adversary of our souls, we have been strictly charged: "Neither give place to the devil." "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." With some of God's devoted people it is one of the strongest motives in resisting the power of the devil that they have a deep-seated aversion to pleasing him, and to becoming his dupes and slaves. From a child I have felt this keenly. Some say they do not believe in his demoniacal power, but they have forgotten our Saviour's encounter with the evil one and the intensity of the admonition to us which the Holy Word contains. We have been forewarned that we simply cannot meet him alone and unequipped. "Put on the

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whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

When, therefore, a man dares any morning to start out upon his life, unfortified against care and temptation, how can he expect to "stand" in his place, much less to 'run the race that is set before" him? How can he hope in all the distractions and perils of the way, to hear the still small voice of God, within the soul, unless in the morning—when the soul is empty and receptive—he cares enough to establish the connection with God and to continue it throughout the day, this union begun in faith, that "faith which cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"?

But above all other fears, to the devout heart, is that of dishonoring its Lord. When He comes to us in His Word as the tender Shepherd, laying down His life for His wan-

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dering sheep, it breaks our hearts to remember our straying away from Him. And for those of us who are within His tender fold, let us remember that the test of our being His own sheep is that we know and follow His voice. "And the sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers."

These last words will reveal to you, my dear friends, why I have so longed to recognize the voice of God in my own soul. For a long time past—it may be for years—this part of the verse has come to me as a refrain: "My sheep know My voice." Its cadence has sounded in my soul, calling me to a clearer discernment of God's voice and will, and to a closer following.

My belief is that we should yield to the con-

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trol of our Heavenly Father at every point of our way, and the deep grief of failing to do so is that we impair the usefulness of our own lives, wherever our path diverges from the way He leads.

And how it crushes our hearts to feel we are dishonoring our Lord. We are all convinced surely that we do this in small things, if, indeed, there are any small wrongs. Each failure in the life of a Christian seems a reflection upon his God. God has promised to keep us if we will look to Him and trust Him and hear His voice. He has said: "He is able to keep us from falling," and "to make all grace abound toward us"; and our failures tend to make others doubt His power. Then we become stumbling blocks in their way, and bring discredit upon our Master, while if we will let Him lead us, the evidence of His power in us will draw others to Him.

The entire life should come under His jurisdiction. The Lord Himself makes this plain. "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known

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me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." And realizing our sins and shortcomings, we cry, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

We hear men of the world, who are not overscrupulous, in their idea of right, speak lightly of the joys of a good conscience. This is when no real danger threatens them; for it is true that "Conscience does make cowards of us all," and why? God's voice is especially heard in the conscience of man: "I know that Thou wilt not hold me innocent. If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean." Not all consciences are enlightened, some are "seared with a hot iron," "even their mind and conscience is defiled."

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Yet even these seem at times to be pierced to the quick. You remember the scene, when our Lord stooped down and wrote on the ground, saying: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last." Not one failed to feel the sting. But Christ calls His own followers to a good conscience—the deepest joy that one can experience on this earth. "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience." "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

What a clear picture is this of mutual confidence. The Eternal King of Heaven holds converse with man, assuring him that He is pleased with his conduct and will especially grant his requests! The Holy Spirit speaks

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to the consciences of men always along the lines of the revealed Word of God and in full harmony with it. The peculiar mission of the Spirit is "to bring to the remembrance" of men the Word of God. Therefore when the Spirit speaks to the soul, through the conscience, His voice is always in unison with Scripture, otherwise it is not the voice of the Spirit. We cannot trust the unenlightened conscience. As the North Star guides the mariners unerringly, so it is the Bible alone, the revealed Word of God, that guides the life of man aright. The mariner's compass must be tested by the North Star, the watch by the sun dial, the conscience by the Holy Book, made plain by the Spirit of God.

Christians do not all realize that not only are they permitted to have the joy of a good and an enlightened conscience, but they are commanded to have this priceless possession. If any doubt it, the proof is readily given in the following clear commands: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of

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faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” “Herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.” “Now the end of this commandment is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience.” “War a good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience.” “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” “My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.” That conscience which is pure before God is enlightened by the Spirit.

Some one will say: “How may I be assured that God is speaking to me, even when I think I hear His admonitions?” Being unaccustomed to listen for His voice, we do not recognize it readily, and some of us must go farther and acknowledge to our shame that, at times, we do not wish to recognize God’s voice, lest our plans be interfered with. We are starting

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upon a certain course, and within us comes a vague sense, that we had better not proceed on our way, and do the act contemplated, or that we should at once attend to something neglected. If we wish to know whether or not this is God's warning suggestion, the way to find out is plain: Ask! Stop where you are, and ask Him—pray! It takes but a moment to lift the heart to God, and we have countless promises that reply will be given. Many of us stifle such convictions, and hasten on our way, sometimes to great danger, from which, in His infinite mercy, God often delivers us. But there is a distressing description of those who utterly reject God's admonitions and go on heedlessly in their own evil way. "I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore, I will put mine hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest."

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God does not deal thus harshly with us without warning. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse and mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." Yet in spite of God's commands and promises we often persist in going on as Balaam did, until he was confronted by the angel with the drawn sword: "Behold I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me."

How dare we attempt to go recklessly on, "Lest haply we be found even to fight against God." "What are we that we could withstand God?" That which He ordains we "cannot overthrow." How much simpler, safer, nobler to be as the little child, who at the first suggestion that God was speaking to him said: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," and having heard heeded. To refuse to heed God's voice, speaking to us through the enlightened conscience, to persist in doing, or

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neglecting to do that about which this inner monitor warns us, is to "resist" and to "grieve" the Holy Spirit of God!

Our Saviour was in close union with the Holy Spirit and led by Him. Two notable examples were: when the Spirit came upon Him at baptism, and when He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. Of Christ it was written, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him."

The most deeply spiritual converse that our God ever has with us, is when the "Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." A striking illustration of this occurred recently, when a young college girl, being present during a conversation about the Holy Spirit, said sadly: "I think I have never truly heard His voice!" But when she was asked if He had not witnessed with her spirit that she was the child of God, a deep light shone in her eyes, and she bowed her head in reverent acquiescence.

Another young woman, who had finished

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her academic course, hearing a similar conversation, said lightly: "Oh, I do not believe as I used, I am taking the scientific view!"—forgetting that "without Christ was not anything made that was made"—and unmindful that if she had given up her Saviour, she "had done despite to the Spirit of Grace" and "had trodden under foot the Son of God, and had counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy thing." She had remained true to her childhood's mother-love, but was too frail to stem the tide of adverse influence and hold fast to her early faith in her Creator—her God—her Saviour, for "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Christ "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," for "without shedding of blood is no remission."

Even more blameworthy than this young girl are those who despoiled her of her childhood's inheritance. Faith, more than a "good name in man and woman" "is the immedi-

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ate jewel of their souls," and he or she
that "filched" from her this priceless gem

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"Robbed her of that which not enriched him
And left her poor indeed."

"Whoso shall offend one of these little ones
that believe in me, it were better for him that
a millstone were hanged about his neck, and
that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Youth needs the tender, watchful care of
those whom "the Holy Spirit hath made over-
seers, to feed the church of God, which He
hath purchased with His own blood."

More sad it seems that we should turn from
the Holy One, when He is so gracious, and
His gifts are so free. Even the presence of
the Spirit is a gift—not earned by us: "Your
Heavenly Father shall give the Holy Spirit to
them that ask Him." And it is by "the Spirit that
we are sealed unto the day of redemption."

We hear a great deal of the Spirit-filled life,
but surely only that life is filled with the Spirit,
which in every direction manifests the fruit

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of the Spirit. "If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit." Christians are far too well satisfied, to have an occasional evidence of the presence of the Spirit, while great territories of their inner nature lie, as it were, in darkness unexplored by the light of God, unyielded to the sway of the Spirit.

The Christian who continues to give way to irritability or ill temper, surely cannot deceive herself into believing that she has a Spirit-filled life. In that part of her nature the Spirit is simply not reigning. There may be other regions conquered by Him, held by his loving sway. She may be unselfish and prompt, orderly and neat, and may be more or less faithful in searching the Scriptures and in prayer, but in the place, small or great, where sin reigns, the voice of the Spirit is not obeyed and the conscience is not pure before God.

Nor could one claim to be following the voice of the Spirit, whose faults were the reverse of those named. Persons who are careless, untidy, thoughtless, forgetful, discon-

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tented, unforgiving, vain or selfish, false or full of pride and self-will, or those who slander or who "take up a reproach against" others, surely cannot think they are harkening to the Spirit, though their conscience may be sore, almost to the touch, with His continuous reproachful suggestions, beseeching them to amend their ways. This is, I believe, not infrequently the case with believers, who have not yet realized their possibilities, and the infinite power of God—to aid them even in their besetting frailties.

A joyful acquiescence in our life, and a real effort to meet it, in Christ's strength, however hard it may seem, is one of the proofs of hearing the Spirit's voice. God says: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," and, "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." With the growth in faith and love to God, comes also to the yielded life, an increasing exactness in the everyday tasks, and this we should pray for and expect.

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The Holy Spirit is the great character builder. It is through His grace, that we are enabled “with all diligence to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, godliness, patience;”—and this is the “patience which through tribulation worketh experience and hope.” Through the power of the Spirit we abandon the old habits and establish the new, and what is character but the accumulation and amalgamation of habits of faith—thought—feeling—speech and action.

Where the Spirit leads there is neither error nor regret, and if we are led impulsively to do something, feeling we are led of the Spirit, as some misguided persons often are, and later find we must apologize for our error, the proof is conclusive that not the Holy Spirit of God, but another influence guided us. God’s Spirit is always right in His guidance, always in accordance with Scripture and therefore not to be repented of.

Life has many perplexing places, my dear friends, and my heart is full of tenderness

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and sympathy for you. I wish I could be near and put my arms about you, when these times come to you, and let you know how my heart yearns for you.

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The decisions of life are the hardest part of all, and there is no way to escape them; they must be met. Yet we need never meet them alone. God is always near with plain promises. He commands us to "ask," to "seek," and He promises to be near and to answer. But beware that you hear His voice aright,—not by some detached portion of Scripture, found at random by opening the Bible where it chances to part; not by such lottery does He lead His children along the right path, but by the same still small voice, the Spirit revealing the Word. We have sometimes to wait, and in cases of deep need we may have to wait long—so long that our patience is deepened and our faith strengthened, but I will quote to you a verse that has helped me at such times: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His

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servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God."

And let us always remember that: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord," and that He says: "Ye shall hear a word behind you saying this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and to the left."

These promises are for our assurance, but the way that God usually guides His people is by the trend of the teachings of the Bible, revealing God's will and made plain to us by the Spirit of God in the soul. Little by little we learn to understand God's mind and will concerning the matter in question, and our own wills acquiesce in His. If you should ask me how I have been guided, I could but say that in my deepest perplexity, I have prayed, read my Bible and waited upon the Lord; and when at last I have seen my way it has been shown me so simply and naturally, so gradually, that I almost wondered why I had hesitated. Nevertheless I know that the

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power to act and go foreward, in any given case, is a reality, and that the feeling of being hindered is also a painful reality. God alone can help in such cases. Then it is that abiding faith, fervent prayer, strong cries, eager and continuous study of the Bible will avail, appealing to the Holy Spirit of God to enlighten us.

I asked a most devout Christian woman, a dear friend, about her view of God's voice to us and His guidance, and she said the difficulty often was that we did not come before Him silent so that we could hear Him and empty so that we could be filled with His Spirit and He could lead us. It is only the empty bucket that can be filled with pure water.

Oftentimes we come only because we are in trouble and we are not accustomed to discerning the inner voice. We cannot hear it, because we do not recognize it. Our spiritual sense is dulled from disuse and past heedlessness. The voice of the Spirit in such a soul reminds us of the piteous wail of the bird,

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warning away Ulysses and his mariners from the fatal shore. Only one of them heard and heeded the cry. The earth-sounds so engrossed the rest that they heeded not and were drawn on to their ruin.

Our age is not characterized by intent listening. The picture of the Indian scout, so vividly described, is a strange one to us: lying upon the ground for hours or days, unconscious of the passage of time, abnormally keen to hear or see. History gives us a touching example of eager listening: we see again a crouching female figure, "her ear unto the ground," we hear her shout of triumph amid the despair and the din of battle—as she alone recognizes reinforcements from afar:

"O, dinna ye hear

The slogan far awa?

The McGregors,—O, I ken it weel;

It's the grandest o' them a'!"

These homely examples may help us to realize that we have not thus eagerly awaited succor from our Heavenly Saviour, and when

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we do, we shall recognize His first gentle approach.

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All along the dangerous way we must be praying. Nehemiah is a strong example of this, as he stood in the presence of the king, while the noble, courageous Joshua is a warning to us all; brave and devout in the great onflow of his life, at one time of crucial testing, he simply used his own judgment, failed to "inquire of God" for light, and brought disgrace and disaster upon himself and God's people.

God always guides His children who are willing to be guided. We have but to place our hand in His and He will lead us unerringly. But let us remember that "there can be no new light upon a Divine command"—even our strong cries to Heaven cannot change a plain statement of God's Word.

The religion of Jesus Christ is no vagary; it is a reality. It is more penetrating than all of the sciences,—“piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit and is a discerner

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of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It has jurisdiction over each act, each thought of the life. Nothing is too small to come under its dominion. I was surprised when talking to a fervent Christian to find that he always considered questions of health, carelessness in taking cold, imprudence in diet, and the like, as wrongs against the family only, and not as coming under the notice or the judgment of God. This seems a grave mistake, for all the life may hinge upon some cold taken, or some indigestion grown into an illness. Did not the fate of nations hang upon the cackling of geese in one instance, and keeping the powder dry in another?

We meet people with odd views, and if they are shared by any of us, it would help us to consider them. There is an idea entertained by many which is fatalism, and not the teaching of God's Word. It would indicate that no effort on our part is needful, that whatever course we pursue, God is with us, aiding us, but this is distinctly wrong. When you or

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I go stubbornly on our way—the way of evil—He certainly does not guide us. If we wish to be coworkers with God, we must avoid drifting on the one hand, and self-will on the other, and must ask guidance. To be led of God is a reality, only to be achieved by genuine spiritual union with Him.

Our Master was also guided by the providences of God. His great miracles, manifesting His power over man and nature, were elicited by the conditions of life about Him. Illustrations of this are the stilling of the storm, the healing of disease and the satisfying of the hungry multitude.

We, too, are both led and controlled by the providences of God, but we must look to God for His own interpretation in all apparent disasters, lest we think we discern in some happening a meaning they were not intended to convey. It is dangerous to take our own view of providences, unaided by the light from God's Word and His Spirit, and even then, we must often wait, simply trusting, for He has said:

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“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” Frequently in His dealings with us, He controls us by closing a door against us, or in a reverse way He leads us, by opening to us a plain and suitable opportunity. God enlightens our intellect, clears our judgment and strengthens our purpose. The whole being is under His sway, if we look to Him and trust Him.

I have a theory that earnest teachers of God often fail to help others as they might, because they do not reveal to them their own personal experience. Naturally, what we have ourselves gone through is better known, more real and more vivid to us than anything else. This, a humble man thinks too poor to offer to others, yet it is just this, the thing he knows, that we want. I tried to get for you, from Christian friends who are truly living epistles of God, some of these vital experiences, and I value them more than I can tell you and I have myself profited by them. Making your need an excuse, I learned from these

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friends things I had not understood, although I have known some of them for years, and I prize what they told me as hidden treasure.

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These friends, whom I quote, may truly be termed successful Christians, otherwise I should not have wished to consult them. It is to those whom we deem successful that we apply for advice, not to those who are incompetent, discouraged, "down-in-the-mouth," as realistic speakers describe them. When we say successful, we do not necessarily mean in money-making or in the acquisition of worldly power; that man is deemed successful who attains what he seeks, if the things sought for are worthy. St. Paul, for instance, was pre-eminently so, and Peter and numberless of God's people since—among whom are the friends I shall quote.

One of them is a minister of the gospel, who while wielding a power for God throughout the Church, is personally a humble follower of Jesus, in close communion with Him. You need only to know him to be assured of this.

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He says concerning the voice of God in the soul, that if Christ should come to us in person, as we in our perplexity so often wish, He would, after making all things clear to us, say: "My child, all of these questions had been already fully answered in my Word. If you had but known your Bible all would have been as plain to you as now, when I have spoken the words to you myself." He maintains that God guides His people by bringing to their remembrance through the power of the Holy Spirit the words of His Holy Book, not a verse here and there but the whole trend of the teaching of the Scriptures. He says emphatically that we have no knowledge of God's will except from the Bible. The Quakers spoke of a knowledge through the Spirit alone, but whenever they said anything to edification, it was something recalled from the previous reading and study of God's Word.

In answer to the question: "How to reprove a case of flagrant wrong?" this saint of

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God, with evident reluctance, replied: "After long preparation sometimes a word will do it." When asked if by preparation he meant long continued prayer and reading of God's Word, he bowed his head in reverent assent. It is but another phase of the same truth, the Spirit of God applying the Word of God to our hearts, until He can speak through us.

I submitted our question also to a man of affairs, prominent and successful, a scientific as well as a business man, honored both in the church and in the world. I asked him what he would say about the voice of God in the soul to a young man if he should come to him for advice. Having heard men, both young and old, speak of his influence with them in his counsel as well as in his life, I listened with peculiar interest for his reply. He answered: "I should tell him to read his Bible and to keep on his knees; he could not expect God to furnish him with a special book of instructions." This he said meditatively, and then breaking off, added: "If any one asked me

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to write upon this subject I should just refuse to do it."

Again I referred the question to a minister, a pastor, a godly man, and immediately he replied, that in this question is involved the modern danger—men depending upon their consciousness of the will of God, instead of going to the Bible itself and depending upon the truth revealed there. In this I acquiesced, assuring him I realized that the subject includes the whole question of the realm and work of the Holy Spirit, but that I wanted to know from him, how he personally knew the voice and received His guidance—in regard to his own daily duties. He replied, "I pray,—I begin in the morning, and I pray in the night." Genuine prayer, not a passing light petition, was indicated. He went on to say that he begged to be enabled to choose aright among his many duties, knowing which to place first, and to keep at and fulfill those chosen. He implored, just for that day, to be kept from doing the thing which was easy and which

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he preferred, and from leaving the task that was distasteful to him. I have seen this man live, and I thanked God for this insight into his methods, for it had seemed to me that it must be easy for him to go steadily and successfully on through his many and great difficulties.

He said he graded his duties according to the standard laid down in the Bible, placing the purely spiritual first, even among those that were religious. And I dare not fail to add that he placed first of all, the necessity to be a devout Christian himself. Therefore, the most imperative duty of the day was the reading and study of the Bible and prayer to God, thus getting into close personal relation with Him.

Still another friend I consulted, a lady who has amazed many who have watched her live—and those nearest have wondered most—at the great and small duties her frail strength has performed. She replied, “I pray,” and, “I begin in the night to implore help and

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strength for the following day." The first hour and a half in the morning is given to her devotions, and after this, those who go to her for spiritual companionship and help, as I have done, find her fully equipped and helpful. I learned, moreover, that her last conscious thought at night was of her Saviour and she prayed that her first waking thought might be of Him.

Will you bear with me a few moments longer, for I feel I should be betraying a trust if, in view of your confidence in me, in asking me to expound this difficult subject to you, I failed to tell you something from my own life which might help you.

The experience came to me at a time of earnest seeking after God, and I believe special spiritual blessings are apt to come at such times. I had two distinct and unusual experiences of the voice of the Spirit in my own heart and life and they were many years apart.—Some might say they were coincidence or imagination, but I will tell you of them and

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you may judge. It is certain that they have left a deep impression upon my life, and I consider them but another direct evidence of the reality of God and His speaking to man. Nor are they more remarkable than the ordinary way in which the Spirit recalls the Bible to our souls day by day. In olden times God spoke often by fire from Heaven; now He reveals Himself by light in the soul.

What I am going to tell you occurred several years ago, before I moved from St. Louis. I was away from home, and was held in the grip of God's providences, as we always are. Whichever way I turned there seemed difficulty and though what I ought to do seemed indicated, I did not feel at peace in going forward. My heart was like the sea in a storm—turbulent! Then this exceptional experience came to me, and I have always felt it was the Holy Spirit in His wonderful capacity as Comforter. No special guidance came to me from it, but simply peace, which enabled me to go on in the difficult place where I found myself.

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The experience was only this: I wakened one morning, repeating the most wonderful words—like words from Scripture—though I did not remember ever having heard them before. They were gone when I fully wakened, only the beautiful impression remained. All day they eluded me. I could not recall even a clause or a word—not so much as to enable me to search for them in the concordance, though I would seek, and almost find them, as when we try to recall a name which has slipped from our memory. The next morning I wakened repeating the words, as the day before,—and this time I could catch just enough to find the verse without doubt in the Bible.

The third morning as I wakened, I was repeating the whole passage from beginning to end. And is it not strange that this verse is three times repeated in the Bible, almost verbatim—yet not exactly? There was difference enough for me to discern just which of these three verses was mine! I doubt whether

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you would notice any difference unless your attention was called to it, but to me it was plain.

My idea that the verse was new to me was dispelled, in this way: you remember one of our dear girls went years ago as a missionary to the Indians; when my letter, telling of this experience was forwarded to her, she replied that before she left us I had given a lesson, taking this verse for the text. It had entirely slipped from my memory, but was no new revelation, just the old story of the loving Spirit bringing to our remembrance the written Word of God, as He does continually to the children of men.

And these are the wonderful words: "Why art thou cast down, oh, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me, hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God!" I feel these blessed words are peculiarly mine, and they have come to me time and again—just when I have been in dire need of them. The

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following are the very similar verses: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." Ps. 42:11; Ps. 42:5; Ps. 43:5.

The other experience to which I alluded, and which to me was far more remarkable—has been one of the strongest influences that has come into my life—of this I will tell you in the next paper which you have appointed for me.

Before I close, my dear friends, may I say a word to those, who may be with us to-day, who have never yet really listened to God's voice, nor learned to recognize it? Surely, beloved, you would not want to be closed out from all the blessedness of which we have been speaking. He has a special word for you to-day and the saddest warning of danger

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could not be more tender: "To-day if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts." He is near and He longs to speak with you. He says: "Come now, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I will meet with thee, and converse with thee." "Lo, I am with you always." "Come unto me and rest."

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THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Ghost, unerring guide,
Lead me, lest I turn aside.
Let my will so yielded be,
I can hear Thee speak to me.

When I'm turning to the wrong,
Warn me as with plaintive song,
That shall send a quivering fear
Through my soul of danger near.

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Let no hoped-for, longed-for prize,
That could charm deluded eyes,
Make me cause my Saviour pain,
Whatsoe'er the fancied gain.

When I stand with faltering feet
Where two ways divergent meet,
Show me which is Thine own choice
By an inward holy voice.

Bring to my distracted brain
Holy words that there have lain,
Learned from Scripture through my life—
Make them clear amid the strife,

With them Thine own voice shall be
Ever in full harmony,
All inspired by Thy rich power,
Man's most priceless earthly dower.

Holy Comforter divine,
Let me all my care resign.
Give Thy peace, Thy joy, Thy rest
While I follow Thy behest.

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Let me not mine own will seek,
Make me lowly, gentle, meek.
May the Saviour's holy face
Be reflected by Thy grace,

In my heart, my life, my will,
That I may Thy plan fulfill,
Trusting every day and hour,
Leaning only on Thy power.

Let my heaven begin while here,
Breathe upon me—ever near—
In Christ's likeness forming me
For Eternity with Thee.

Ho-ly Ghost, un-err-ing Guide,

Lead me, lest I turn a-side;

Let my will so yield-ed be,

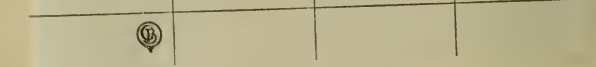
I can hear Thee speak to me.

Gottschalk.

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